

## **Arkansas Department of Education**

Dr. Tom Kimbrell, commissioner

### **News release**

June 20, 2011

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## **EDUCATION COMMISSIONER ACTS TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL OPERATIONS OF THE HELENA-WEST HELENA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell today exercised his authority under state law to remove the superintendent and dissolve the board of the Helena-West Helena School District.

The action was taken to immediately move toward stabilizing the finances and management of the troubled district in Phillips County in preparation for students returning for the 2011-2012 school year.

“It is not a move we have made lightly,” Dr. Kimbrell said. “We have worked with officials of the Helena-West Helena School District, but there has been a lack of improvement. Our primary concern is the education of the students in this community. For the good of the students and the staff, state action had to be taken now.”

The department made its decision regarding the district in consultation with Gov. Mike Beebe who fully supports Dr. Kimbrell in this matter.

Dr. Kimbrell and other key ADE staff arrived in Helena-West Helena this morning to inform the superintendent, Willie Williams, of the changes in district leadership. Steps have been taken to secure school records and to ensure district operations will continue uninterrupted.

Suzann McCommon, director of the Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative in Helena-West Helena, has agreed to serve as chief executive officer of the district. She will report directly to Dr. Kimbrell. Ulicious Reed, a former superintendent of the Marvell district, will serve with McCommon as the district's chief operations officer.

McCommon indicated that she is firmly committed to engaging the entire community in a comprehensive school turnaround effort. She will release later this summer a schedule for upcoming public meeting dates as well as further details about district priorities for the upcoming school year.

McCommon comes to the position with more than 35 years of experience in education, including 10 years in the Helena-West Helena School District and 26 years as director of Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative.

Last year, the ADE identified Helena-West Helena as being in fiscal distress because of declining fund balances and several findings in an audit by the Division of Legislative Audit, which identified a lack of financial controls, among other things.

The State Board placed the district in fiscal distress in September, 2010. Under the Omnibus Quality Education Act of 2003, the education commissioner has authority to exercise a state takeover of districts in fiscal distress that don't adequately correct their problems.